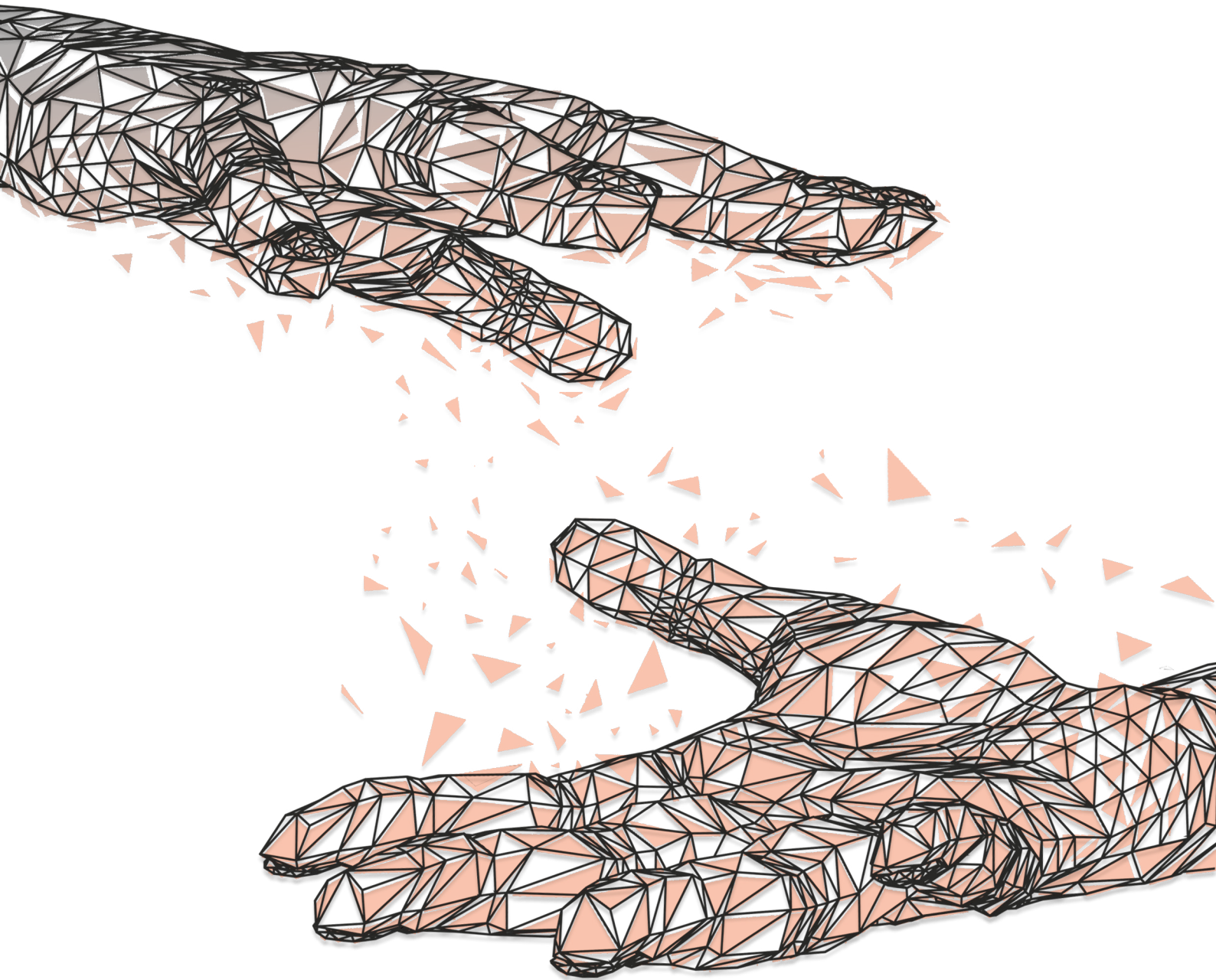


**COUNSELLING PRACTITIONER  
BEGINNER TO ADVANCED**



**COUNSELLING  
SKILLS**

## PHASE ONE

Phase one can be regarded as the relating stage of the counselling process. These are foundational questions which are built upon in phase 2 and 3. The main goal of phase 1 is for the counsellor to start establishing a trusting relationship with their client. They do this through posing open and explorative questions which aim to gather information about their client, and help the counsellor explore the world through their clients' eyes: seeing what they see, feeling what they feel, etc..

What phase 1 sets out to accomplish is to establish a rough sense of what it means to be the client; to understand them fundamentally, and have them know that they are understood, so that they feel more comfortable opening up about the details of their life.

The counselling skills you employ as a counsellor are not set in stone, but the most common skills used at this stage are:

### PARAPHRASING

Paraphrasing is repeating back in our own words what we heard from the client. Paraphrasing reflects the essence of what they've said according to our understanding, a technique which gives the client an opportunity to clarify or correct if they deem it necessary.

People usually 'hear what they expect to hear' due to their own assumptions, prejudices or stereotypes. When paraphrasing, it's essential that we don't introduce our own ideas or question the person's thoughts, feelings or actions. Our responses should be non-directive and non-judgemental.

Paraphrasing what the other person is saying can feel funny at first; people tend to think the other person will be annoyed at them for repeating them. However, when used correctly, paraphrasing will receive a positive reaction and play a pivotal part in driving a conversation for

Although practice will never make perfect, it will make you permanently better than what you've ever been before! Use the following practice statements to structure a response that will allow you to paraphrase what you think the other person might be saying.

**Speaker:** 'I was in a bad mood yesterday because work has been so stressful. I just can't keep up with everything I have to do.'

**You (Paraphrasing):**

**Speaker:** 'I feel like I'm doing all of the work around the house. I need you to help me clean and do the dishes more often.'

**You (Paraphrasing):**



**Speaker:** 'I don't understand what she wants from me. First, she says she wants one thing, then another.'

**You (Paraphrasing):**

**Speaker:** 'I've been worried when you don't answer your phone. I always think something might've happened to you.'

**You (Paraphrasing):**

### REFLECTING BACK

Reflecting back is when the counsellor concentrates on the emotional content of a client's dialogue, and points out what they believe their client is saying/not saying; shares with the client what they're hearing/not hearing; and shares what they're sensing based on their client's tones and facial expressions.

This technique is essential, as it aims to assert whether or not the counsellor has heard their client correctly and affirm that they're on the same wavelength. Counsellors shouldn't attempt to move forward with a counselling relationship until their client has given them the permission to do so.

The tonality we employ when speaking can sometimes have a bigger impact on someone than what we actually say. As Professor Albert Mehrabian identified, tone of voice is responsible for about 38% of the message we send during communications. Tone includes the volume we use, the level and type of emotion that we communicate, and the emphasis we place on certain words.

We can tone up at the end of a sentence if we want to turn it into a question, or tone down when issuing a command or provoking someone to take action. Without ending a sentence with tonality, other people will perceive our communications as a series of statements.

**Repeat the following sentence out loud:**

'I know how to do it.'

Now let's play with the emphasis — try putting the emphasis on the first word.

**1.** 'I know how to do it.'

Pay close attention to the feel of the sentence and the meaning behind the communication. Now let's try putting the emphasis on the second word.

**2.** 'I **KNOW** how to do it.'

Now try putting the emphasis on each word in turn and listen to how the meaning and implications in the same sentence can completely change depending on which word is emphasized and what emotion is put behind it.





Practice with other sentences and ask yourself how differently it could be interpreted by a client each time:

**WHAT** do you mean by that?  
What **DO** you mean by that?  
What do **YOU** mean by that?  
What do you **MEAN** by that?  
What do you mean **BY** that?  
What do you mean by **THAT**?

### BASIC EMPATHY

Basic empathy involves acknowledging the emotional content inside of our clients' verbal or nonverbal communications. This is achieved by putting ourselves in our client's shoes in a non intrusive way; it's not about interjecting your own life narrative into the session, or giving personal advice, very specific advice, but rather by commenting on what you observe which prompts and encourages the client to open up more to you. Statements which would prompt this response include: "it seems that this is a bit of a problem with you" or "this seems to be a very traumatic experience for you to recall", etc..

### ATTENDING

Attending is when a counsellor is deeply aware of all the roadblocks and distractions which impact active listening, and give their clients their full, undivided attention. When we attend a client, we focus solely on them in a state where we are emptied of ourselves. The aim of attending it to remain totally objective whilst looking for something relevant in the session that our client can get meaning from if brought to their attention by us.

### ACTIVE LISTENING

Paraphrasing and reflecting back can only be employed provided the counsellor applies an active listening technique to ensure they're hearing everything their clients tell them. If counsellors want to sharpen their ability to understand others, it's crucial that they learn to listen attentively to their clients at all times. Listening exists on a scale of consciousness which are classified as:

- 1. Ignoring:** When the person being spoken to is not paying attention to anything being said.
- 2. Pretending:** When the person listening feigns interest and comprehension.
- 3. Selective listening:** When the person listening only hears what they expect or want to hear.
- 4. Attentive listening:** When the person listening pays close attention to what someone is saying.
- 5. Active (Empathic) listening:** When the person listening focuses on fully analysing and comprehending what someone else is trying to say.

Active listening is when counsellors attempt to understand and empathise with a client's emotions and thoughts. Empathy differs from sympathy in that empathy extends just feeling compassionate for another person and invests in formulating



a deeper and more insightful perspective. Active listening involves listening and responding to the other person in a way that improves mutual understanding and trust, and allows the person speaking to release their emotions and any tension. By creating an environment which encourages problem solving, active listening engages a client in a way which makes them feel safer and thus more willing to bring buried information to the surface of discussion.

Active listening serves as a therapeutic way to better understand and help clients without interrupting them with offers of advice or silent judgement. However, asking appropriate questions during active listening aids clarification and allows for reflection; two essential components necessary to avoid misunderstandings. The goal of listening is to create more meaningful connections with others, build empathy and understand what it means to be the other person (as much as realistically possible).

### PHASE TWO AND THREE

Phases two and three can be regarded as the Relating stage and Changing stage of the counselling process respectively. You can implement the following techniques in phase one should you deem it suitable, but they tend to be best placed in the latter half of the counselling relationship.

#### SILENCE

Offering appropriate silence and stillness gives our client the crucial time and space they need to reflect. The role of a counsellor is to facilitate the way in which their clients gain new insight into their lives, which they can't gain if a counsellor is dominating the conversation.

#### CHALLENGING

Challenging has a very negative connotation, but this technique is not about injecting aggression or hostility into the counselling relationship. Challenging isn't about counsellors disagreeing with or confronting a client's beliefs or issues; but rather, it's about encouraging them to challenge themselves, and look at the way they're living their life from different perspectives and attitudes. Though before we go forth and challenge our client, we must first encourage them to look deeper within themselves. When we encourage them to look at themselves, we ask them to do so objectively, so that they subsequently analyse what they see objectively. Once strengthened by our encouragement, we challenge them to wrestle with this insight.

#### ADVANCED EMPATHY

Building upon our prior technique of relaying empathy, advanced empathy is where we become fully immersed in silences our clients create after relaying something traumatic or extremely upsetting. This form of silent solidarity exemplifies to our client that we are being there with them in their entirety.

#### IMMEDIACY

Immediacy is when a counsellor reflects back the emotional feedback being shared with them as a client opens up. As a counsellor, there may be times when you recognise incongruences with your client, such as them employing a defence mechanism. In these scenarios, it is not the responsibility of the counsellor



to manage a client's emotions; but rather their responsibility as a counsellor to manage themselves when presented with these emotions. A counsellor does this by acknowledging the emotion rather than asking the client to change or amend it, which forces the client to then take responsibilities for any emotions they're bringing to their relationships.

### **SELF DISCLOSURE**

Whilst a counselling relationship is not about sharing your stories, empathising to the point of overstepping the mark and transferring your experiences onto a client, there may be, in some cases, an opportunity when you can disclose to the client that you've shared an experience they're going through. This should never be expressed in great detail, and should not overshadow or dominate a session in any way. However, when done correctly, it's an incredibly powerful technique which creates bonds of relatability between client and counsellor and expands the empathy.

It's a powerful statement to be made in a counselling relationship to demonstrate to a client that their counsellor is ok enough within themselves to share their warts and all. The more a client can relate and trust their counsellor, the more they'll feel understood, open up more and take responsibility for themselves.

### **LINKING IDEAS**

Linking ideas is an advanced communication skill which involves making connections between progress and connection. Linking ideas educates our clients, not in an academic or instructional way, but in an edifying way: a way which helps them make connections within themselves which they can explore in more detail alongside their counsellor.

### **GIVING APPROPRIATE INFORMATION**

When we feel confident enough in both our skills as a practitioner and counselling relationship, we will be able to bring in new, external information into the session. This could be about ourselves, or a third party member. This external information helps the client formulate objective perspectives on similar and relatable cases to their own, and ultimately helps them create more links within themselves.

### **IDEA STORMING**

Idea storming is usually a skill we employ during the latter half of our counselling relationships, as it's when we challenge clients to make changes in between sessions. It's not about giving our clients some kind of homework, but giving them the opportunity to take ownership and act upon an insight they attained during a session. When we ideastorm, we ask our clients how they think they could use what they learned in the session, transform it into some form of action and implement it into the real world. This technique is all about helping our clients learn how to take away what they learn from sessions and adapt their insights into the context of their own life.

### **VISUALISATION**

Most anxiety in life stems from people not having a direction in life, and feeling uncertain and indecisive about where they ought to go, or what might happen to them. The key to overcoming this is in helping your client formulate a vision for themselves and keeping them focussed on that. Not only can positive visualisation





stabilise a person's sense of purpose, negative visualisation (i.e. how the future will be if nothing changes which) can serve as an even more powerful motivator for change.

### CREATIVE THINKING

In the same vein as the 'giving appropriate information' technique, creative thinking involves forwarding and imposing external information onto their client's case, only this time in the form of metaphorical and allegorical items. Creative thinking requires the counsellor to collate and connect the nuggets of information they've been given by their client and feed them back in a creative, abstract way. This might be through telling a similar story, recalling a relatable metaphor, employing symbolism, or even bringing in physical objects into sessions to symbolise and present your client's case in a new way to them.

### EVALUATIONS

Offering a hunch to a client about something they've brought up in a session should never be presented as attempting to put words in their mouth, but rather about proposing a conclusion or overall evaluation about the subject at hand. For example, this might be an evaluation about what may need to be addressed or changed, but it should never be stated as an order or an answer to anything. At the end of the day, it's important for our clients to take ownership of what changes are made in their life, and not feel reliant on their counsellor to give them 'the answer'. Once a client is clear on what the problem is in their life, they'll be more certain about the part they need to play in implementing change in their life.

### IDENTIFYING PATTERNS AND THEMES

The longer a counselling relationship lasts, the easier it is for a counsellor to identify and take note of connections, themes and patterns of behaviour underlying their client's case. Identifying these patterns helps the counsellor ask their client about what other areas of their life these patterns impact. This will help bring to light how far these patterns spread, or how localised they are, and may even reveal previously unconsidered details about their negative outputs. Identifying rogue or unusual areas of a client's life which are negative impacted by the same patterned behaviour can shed a whole new perspective on what causes or triggers their negative outputs, and draws clients into looking at their problem within the bigger picture of their lives.

